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MENTAL ILLNESS AND THE TRAUMAS OF APARTHEID

A Psychoanalytical Reading of Zoë Wicomb's
Playing in the Light

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Abstract

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Abstract: Zoë Wicomb's novel *Playing in the Light* (2006) critically examines the perilous times of apartheid in South Africa through the condition of play-whites. This thesis particularly focuses on the psychological unrest and traumatic experiences of two characters – Marion Campbell, and her mother, Helen Charles – whose disarrayed mental state is believed to be emblematic of the destructive ramifications of apartheid and the play-white act on the human psyche. By employing a psychoanalytical reading of their narratives in chronological order based on Frantz Fanon's observation of neuroticism as portrayed in *Black Skin/ White Masks* and on Freudian dream interpretation that evokes the repressed, I argue that the two women in their different historical placements in South Africa embody an obsession with higher whiteness that is associated in the Fanonian sense with what I call 'flamboyant' neuroticism, or mental illness. The unmasking property of this essay takes a deconstructive form by moving between the childhood and adolescent years of the characters in order to conclude that the placement of whiteness on the pedestal of ultimate existence by the racially structured regime of South Africa proved to be fatal for Helen under the oppression of apartheid, whereas Marion despite her psychological traumas was able to embrace a hybrid identity, thus symbolizing the new South Africa.

Keywords: Wicomb, *Playing in the Light*, Whiteness, Mental Illness, Colouredness, Psychoanalysis, Trauma, Apartheid, Frantz Fanon, Freud

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1. Introduction

Zoë Wicomb has been appraised for her wit, innovation, and sophistication since her first publication of short stories in the collection *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987). In later years, her elaborate unraveling of the multifaceted legacies of the history of apartheid and its post-colonial ironies, granted Wicomb's oeuvre a canonical position in postcolonial South African English literature and criticism. In particular, her novel *Playing in the Light* (2006) has garnered substantial scholarly notice as an exemplar of "postcolonial intertextuality" (Hoegberg 484) due to the author's "sensitive and imaginative" (Van der Vlies 584) engagement with the "complex entanglements" of South Africa's race and "identity politics" (Phiri 117).

Set in post-apartheid Cape Town in 1994, which ought to be "a period of euphoria after the turmoil of the liberation struggle", the novel in contrast unravels retrospectively the mentally disorientated and distressful story of Marion Campbell, the daughter of Helen Charles and John Campbell (Phiri 120). Presented as a young, middle-class, business owner of white Afrikaner descent, Marion is suddenly haunted by the image of a black female figure that commands her "to remember" the past, thus forcing her out of her oblivion and to embark on a journey to find her origins with the help of Brenda (Wicomb 54). Typified by premonitions, uncanny nightmares, and panic attacks, Marion's delving into her repressed and silenced childhood discloses her parents' racial passing as white during the apartheid era. Through the disjoint parallel narration of Helen Charles and John Campbell's paradoxical story in the years of apartheid, the reader is especially informed of Marion's oppressed childhood due to Helen's fatal neurotic obsession with high-class, whiteness, and Englishness, and her father's compliance.

Previous research, including the works of Erasmus, Robolin, Olaussen, Hoegberg, Jacobs, and others, have widely addressed the racial implications of the era in relation to the novel's engagement with historicity or what the author herself refers to as the "'bound-upness' of race with other modalities" (Phiri 118). Nevertheless, the intricate connection of a racialized experience to mental illness with which the characters are evidently inundated has been neglected. Hence, this essay will focus on what I regard is Wicomb's thoughtful configuration of whiteness with mental illness that was reinforced by the racially divided

status quo of apartheid South Africa. In particular, this thesis will argue that *Playing in the Light* (2006) extrapolates the tensions of race – that is, whiteness in lieu of colouredness – and its association with high-class and Englishness, through the psychological unrest and traumatic experiences of its characters.

Critics examining the historical development of coloured identities as a product of European colonization elucidate the exaltation of a white identity. It has been noted in particular that the racial classification of apartheid South Africa rendered racially mixed identities, such as coloureds, an “un-homed” state, due to the racial confinement of colouredness “as less than white and better than black” (Dass 137; Erasmus 24). In light of this background information, this paper will assume that Helen and John’s masking of their colouredness reveals the central theme of the interrelated yet opposing nature of racial division that was exacerbated in the course of apartheid by racial passing and the pursuit of whiteness. Hence, the essence of whiteness in the novel gains significant meaning on the grounds of its positioning against blackness – which renders whiteness as the norm and colouredness as a shameful condition that ought to be concealed.

Wicomb explains that while *Playing in the Light* may seem to reprimand the masked facade of whiteness, hers was an attempt at “unmasking it” (Phiri 119). Indeed, the novel’s engagement with the historical archive demonstrates that whiteness is, in reality, an “empty signifier, both everything and nothing”; “a construct, [which] cannot be fully addressed” (“Five Afrikaner Texts” 371, 363). Accordingly, my essay will elaborate on the notion of a metaphorical connotation of whiteness which is emblematic of the destructive ramifications of apartheid and the corroding effects of the play-white game on the human psyche – in agreement with the novel’s *unmasking* properties. With its point of departure the contextualization of the narrative in the wider financial and racial incongruence of the various social strata in the apartheid-era of 1940-1950 and its aftermath after the 90’s, the purpose of this discussion is to perform a deconstructive analysis of whiteness. Thus, I consider it imperative to treat whiteness in association with Englishness and higher-class – what I will refer to as higher whiteness, according to Helen’s conception and consequently Marion’s unconscious reiteration – that placed it on the pedestal of superiority and which forced degrading racial experiences. Using Frantz Fanon’s theoretical framework that regards the pursuit of an unattainable condition such as whiteness to be neurotic, my discussion will show that *Playing in the Light* is not only critical of experiential racialization that is masked by

whiteness; but as Wicomb implies, my analysis will highlight how whiteness is axiomatically an illusion of nothingness – thus cannot amount to anything but ‘flamboyant’ neuroticism, or mental illness (85).

In order to achieve that, I will examine the characters’ mental states by utilizing the historical frame of events. Specifically, this paper will assume that in the novel the sociopolitical climate of South Africa, with all its traumatic racial repercussions, reverberates in three psychologically disarrayed periods – each of which will be discussed in a separate section. The first chapter of my analysis will provide a psychoanalytical discussion of Helen, whose story chronologically precedes her daughter’s. On the axis of her desire for the “brightest” shade of “whiteness” (Wicomb 128) – a property of the elite English that lead her to ontological crisis, “insanity”, and death from cancer (Ateh Laue 126) – I will attempt to show that her repressed white life and childhood memories allude to the sociopolitical instability of the apartheid era. Unlike previous studies, the second section will focus on Marion’s psychological distress prior to her encounter with her true origins, which I believe resembles her mother’s neurotic behaviors and mirrors the “burden of history” of apartheid and the traumas of her repressed childhood (Wicomb 152). Last but not least, in light of the current state affairs, the final chapter will aim at showing that after equally traumatic events – i.e. the process of uncovering her colouredness that is overshadowed by mental adversity – Marion in contrast to Helen can to a certain degree rise above the racial dichotomization of Cape Town’s regime, thus symbolizing and simultaneously critiquing the post-apartheid era.

By drawing on previous research, my analysis will presume that Wicomb’s critique of post-apartheid Cape Town is made evident when Marion is forced to revisit repressed parts of her childhood memories and hence is positioned in the wider backdrop of a silenced and unstable past of “generational” “complicity” (Olaussen 151). In addition, this paper will conclude in contrast to previous articles that Marion’s recollections represent the ‘new’ South Africa that is struggling to emerge from apartheid’s decades of racial oppression. The significance of this “historical” moment in emphasizing mental illness follows Wicomb’s own definition of becoming an “ex-play white” as “an anachronism”, since 1994 was a year of “ontological crisis” for the play-whites, revealing that “embracing whiteness amounted to nothing” (Phiri 120, 121). Elaborating on this very notion of ontological crisis, my psychoanalytical reading of *Playing in the Light* will delve deeper into the psychological connotations of Helen and Marion’s anxieties by observing their mental state after the

analysis of each major traumatic event. Ateh Laue and Hoegberg's articles will be used to strengthen my own interpretation of Helen's obsession with whiteness and Marion's unconscious reiteration as the cause of mental illness.

Furthermore, regardless that Marion is later traumatized by the recovery of the truth of being coloured, my analysis will show, as opposed to other studies, that in contrast to Helen's identity deterioration, Marion's escape to London and the reading of novels allows her to embrace her newly recovered colouredness and to partly bury her whiteness along with the Apartheid project in a process of "grieving for both a loss and a discovery of self" (Gurnah 274). As a result, the protagonist's awakening to the reality of a new South Africa of "unremitted crossings" produces symbolically her emersion from the ashes of the past as a hybrid version of herself – what the author refers to as a "speckled guinea fowl" – a person neither black nor white, yet simultaneously both (Wicomb 107, 1).

Despite that the novel's psycho-dramatic tone has been previously acknowledged, only few commentators delve into a holistic psychoanalytical reading of *Playing in the Light* (see Ateh Laue), which could be attributed to the distance that South African literature has maintained from using Western hermeneutics (Esonwanne 140). However, as stated in her interview with Aretha Phiri, Wicomb herself endorses the work of Frantz Fanon, whose theoretical framework of racial division has allowed for a critical revision of the anomalous structure of South Africa's long colonial past. In addition, the novel's categorical use of uncanny dreams and the protagonist's strife to interpret them seem to refer to Freudian dream interpretation theories with which Wicomb must have been familiar, given her academic status. For this reason, my analysis will provide a critical review of previous studies while taking as its main theoretical point of departure Frantz Fanon's sophisticated work *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008) and in relation to Marion's dreams, Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) – which will be discussed in the next section.

2. Theoretical Background

Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) is concerned with the psychoanalytical study of race in postcolonial societies in the context of their national histories. Specifically, Fanon uncovers the experience of black subjects in white-dominated societies and provides an extensive and detailed description of the psychological disequilibrium associated with the imposed desire but inability to attain whiteness. As such, Fanon maintains that the rise of an "inferiority complex" of the black individual or "superiority" of the white is a social phenomenon constructed on the basis of the assumptions of racial superiority and an economic hierarchy. Once internalized, the inferiority of blackness and the supremacy of a white identity are according to Fanon the cause of neurosis to the patient (74, 4).

More specifically, Fanon's theory of neurosis dwells on the unconscious yet impulsive wish of the colonized "to be white" by adopting the characteristics and behaviors of the colonizer – a wish that needs to be repressed due to the racially divided sociocultural and political structures of the colony (9). It can be said that this desire is guided by real economic, cultural, and material disparities that constantly empower the white subject and degrade the black. On this account, the neurotic condition manifests itself in the dream of the colonized to obtain the humanity granted to white subjects, but which aspiration clashes with the oppressed existence of the black body in a racist culture. Consequently, the urge that remains unfulfilled leads to irrational actions and beliefs regarding whiteness that produce a neurotic disorder. What is more, Fanon develops Freudian trauma theories by explaining that neuroticism is the result of childhood psychical traumas that have been stored in the unconscious mind. Fanon's theory focuses on fantasized experiences as well that can be induced indirectly from sociocultural oppression, leading to trauma. In other words, according to Fanon, neurosis is not only a pathological condition of the psyche but also a common psychosocial phenomenon of colonization.

Although Fanon denounces "timeless truths" and limits his analysis on the "Antilles" and not "Africa", *Black Skin, White Masks* remains highly relevant to my study of *Playing in the Light* (7), since the novel's unraveling of the play-white-act as practiced by coloureds implies the concealment of their dark skin with white masks and, hence, elucidates their obsession with whiteness, which is evidently the topic of Fanon's book (7). Following this

notion, this theoretical stance will allow for an in-depth analysis of Helen's neuroticism as a result of her obsession with whiteness during her play-white game. Secondly, by taking as the point of departure for my analysis that "the structure of South Africa is a racist structure" and that "only a psychoanalytical interpretation of the [...] problem can lay bare the anomalies [...] responsible for the structure of the complex", as Fanon maintains, I will be able to deepen the psychoanalytical discussion of the chosen characters in the context of apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa (Fanon 64, 3). Next, since Fanon's work elaborates on the obsessive desire of blacks to attain whiteness as an implication of colonization, its applicability to *Playing in the Light* appears pertinent to my notion of neuroticism and mental illness as the dramatic "traumas of the apartheid era" (Van der Vlies 583).

Finally, the majority of the topics addressed in *Black Skin, White Masks*, including the role of white "language" (8); "white" "beauty" and its relation to "daylight" (32); the religious connections of blackness to "sin" and whiteness to "virtue" (106); these issues are all subjects that Wicomb has purposefully and ingeniously exposed in the novel. Thus, by observing Fanon's progressive analysis of neurosis, this paper will focus on the traumatic experiences of the characters that emanate from such racist ideologies of the apartheid era.

Lastly, in my analysis of Marion's traumas Freudian dream theory, concluding that "multiple traumas, frequently analogous and repeated" "to be found in childhood" appear in the "mnemic residues" of the dream content, is of equal importance (Freud qtd. in Fanon 111; *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 7). Specifically, in my opinion, the novel's portrayal of Marion's dreams and their uncanny character are symbolic of the protagonist's mental illness that is clearly manifested in her psychologically intense nightmares. Consequently, in my discussion of this topic, Sigmund Freud's seminal work *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) that engages in psychoanalytical dream interpretation by drawing on the evocation of the repressed which can cause night terrors can further assist in confirming the protagonist's psychological distress (181). Additionally, Freud's dream theories exploring "[t]he idea that the dream concerns itself chiefly with the future, whose form it surmises in advance - a relic of the prophetic significance", as presented in his book, could be used to explain Marion's dream experiences in terms of their future implications, that is, their role in uncovering her origins (36).

3. Helen Charles: Whiteness, Englishness, Mental Illness

Observing Fanon's progressive analysis of neurosis and the actual timeframe of events, this first chapter will analyze the early life and death of Helen Charles that precedes Marion's story, in order to highlight Helen's obsession with higher whiteness and Englishness that was induced by the racist climate of apartheid, and which I believe was passed on to Marion. In accordance with Fanon's theory, this section will assume that Helen's mental condition emanates from traumatic experiences, that is, her sexual degradation and her repressed childhood memories, which result in neuroticism and eventually in a psychosomatic disease.

"Helen Karelse, alias Helen Charles", the deceased wife of John Campbell and mother of Marion Campbell whose tragic life reflects the peril of the apartheid era in its fullest effect, is the only character in *Playing in the Light* that suffers the most severe psychological or neurotic breakdown due to her obsession with whiteness (Wicomb 117). It all began after what she recalls a "sign from above" (128) of her and John's potential racial passing as white under the (re)classification system imposed by the Population Registration Act of 1950 that Helen planned their new lives. What Helen, nevertheless, had not imagined is the humiliation and life-altering "reinvention" (131) and "obliteration" (142) that "respectable whiteness" required (131). Helen's association of respectability and whiteness with class and of colouredness with shame – a notion that *Playing in the Light* evidently criticizes – resembles Fanon's revision of the history of blackness during European colonization. Fanon recollects the state of blackness as the "archetype of the lowest values" (146); of "sin" (106) and darkness (146); and of "Evil and Ugliness" (139), that further creates a feeling of not only "inferiority" but of "nonexistence" (106); and which relates whiteness to "innocence" or a "heavenly light" (32).

Thus, in the presence of such stereotypical pairings of black and white rooted in colonialism and white supremacy in apartheid Cape Town, Helen wishes to emerge as "a white person who [...] is generally accepted as a white person" and "who [...] is [not] generally accepted as a coloured person", as indicated in the Population Registration Amendment Act of 1950 (Wicomb 144). I believe that in this manner she unconsciously

embodies Fanon's "inferiority complex", desiring to achieve her "only" "destiny", that is, "a white existence" (178). However, the inferiority complex is the outcome of economic disparity and "subsequently, the internalization—or, better, the epidermalization—of this inferiority" (Fanon 4). It can thus be deduced, that Helen's aspirations are not limited to the obliteration of colouredness per se but seek to annihilate any connection to a miscegenational heritage and its ties to poverty, slavery, and the "past" (Wicomb 128). Helen manages as well to "rid [her name] of the nasty possessive [...] -se [that] spoke of an unspeakable past, of being [a] slave". This accomplishment, I suggest, signals an open door to a future of what I would like to call 'higher whiteness', that is, a higher-class English whiteness, which would ultimately conceal her and John's colouredness (Wicomb 128). In contrast to simply being white, adopting an English etiquette and climbing the social ladder would place the couple in a hierarchical position equal to that of the 'colonizer', earning them power and resources – as Fanon explains.

Helen enthusiastically embraces the fantasy: she initiates her and John's relocation to a "decent white area" (130) that would become a prestigious symbol of their "small new island of whiteness" (152) and agrees to her dark-skinned mother's concealed identity as a servant; practices her English language skills "thanks to the SABS" (125); follows an English "etiquette" and *savoir-vivre* (139); switches apparel (10, 146) and home décor (133); and attends the Anglican Church in lieu of the black-related-Moravian-mission. Here, Helen's neurotic attachment to high-class English cultural standards and to the (colonizer's) language are indispensable to the inferiority complex and are driven by Helen's correlation between English and high class prestige that would mask her family's racial passing, as shown in the following quote:

Every colonized people [...] in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality—finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness... (Fanon 9)

In accordance with Fanon's ideas, Helen's perseverance to passing as 'inherently' white is a matter of elevation within the racial and social continuum. Building on this argument, Helen's mastery of English connotes the acquisition of higher-class whiteness – which would prevent any suspicions of racial passing (Fanon 9). It is exactly against the backdrop of this concept of whiteness that Helen develops "neurotic" behaviors, hiding behind "curtains" during the "play" in "secrecy" (10); restricting her husband's drinking habits (52), rhotic accent, and

relations with his relatives (157); prohibiting Marion's games of rolling in the mud as a "native" (60), playing with her peers (195), and speaking Afrikaans; denying her daughter another sibling due to fearing the birth of a dark child (130); and not attending her mother's funeral. Clearly, the references to the primary text used confirm the principles of inferiority as quoted above; yet, one should be reminded that in light of Fanon's theory these references point to Helen's neurosis following a traumatic experience as the result of the impossibility of changing one's skin – to which I will soon turn (14).

In my opinion, it could be said that Helen's sexual abuse by Councilor Carter is this type of major traumatic experience to which Fanon refers. Interestingly, Hoegberg and Olausen have considered how only Councilor Carter's ability to notice Helen's colouredness and to extort "sexual favors" in return for an "affidavit" debilitates her agency and troubles her consciousness (486; 155-156). I would like to add that during the incident when Carter recognizes that "in spite of the red-auburn hair she was dark", yet his" eyes "drilled [...] through the buttoned shirt and found [...] blushing brown nipples set in dark aureoles", there is a double connotation of significant meaning (139). When sexually abusing Helen, the Councilor does not simply 'drill' through Helen's body but also past her 'white mask'. Their sexual encounter then inflicts a detrimental psychological trauma on Helen's psyche, which clearly mirrors Fanon's notion of psychical trauma in the context of colonization and reveals Helen's ultimate price for pursuing whiteness: racial and sexual degradation (Hoegberg 487). Likewise, Laue asserts that regardless of Helen's "predominantly 'white' features", she repeatedly experiences self-alienation through the white gaze, such as that of Carter (124). Focusing on how Helen is covered in a feeling of shame and defilement due to committing adultery and to being persistently reminded of her sinful dark body, both Laue and Hoegberg emphasize her desire for purification.

This is clearly shown when, after earning Carter's signature of the affidavit, Helen is reminded of the "definition of whiteness according to Act No. 30" in the Population Registration Act of 1950 and correlates it with the Biblical "Acts of the Apostles" and the Christian notion of "rebirth" (Wicomb 144). Corresponding to these latter Acts, narrating the "miracles" of individuals starting their "lives anew speaking in fresh tongues" (Wicomb 144), Hoegberg argues that Helen hopes to receive God's forgiveness in order to proceed with her new English white life (487). Therefore, in order to obliterate the "last trace of her sins" as verification that "God had forgiven her" and that she could "be white as driven snow", Helen

participates in Father Gilbert's feet-washing ceremony (Wicomb 160-161). However, in her consciousness there still remains a "memory of skin" and "sin" that she assumes is "conquerable" – but that is refuted later on – which once more confirms Fanon's conception of virtuous whiteness and abominable blackness (Wicomb 160). This memory adverts to John's "[shaving] off the dead skin" of Helen's feet that "grew vigorously" "into tough leather" and to the body's broad ability to bring to remembrance the "unshod coloured child" (148).

Helen is in reality astonished by the skin's memory and the "body's refusal to acknowledge the new woman" (Wicomb 148), or what Fanon terms as the "consciousness of the body" (83). As stated in his theory, this is a "negating activity" guided by a "third-person consciousness" that surrounds the "body by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty" (Fanon 83). Specifically, by quoting Césaire, Fanon recalls how "it is [useless] painting the foot ... white, [since] the strength of the bark cries out from beneath the paint..." (Césaire, qtd. in Fanon 153-154). Similarly, Helen's re-growing dark feet skin that Campbell attempts to mask in white echoes the true nature of Helen's complexion, repressed beneath her 'white paint'. Laue reframes this as the consequence of the white gaze that encircles Helen's body, causing a "double" or "split consciousness", which is physically materialized in the form of a psychosomatic disease, that is cancer, and psychologically in "the form of an imaginary friend" (123). Yet, unaware of these implications, whether due to her naiveté or blindness, Helen insists on believing that her new persona could finally be "cleansed and bathed in holiness, her very feet tamed and certified by God", releasing the woman from her subjugation to Carter's gaze and the memory of her "blackberry" skin (Wicomb 161).

In contrast to Helen's credulous contemplations of being remade, Fanon's theory calls attention to Césaire's fatal settlement with his double consciousness, who after lying "bare the white man in himself, he killed him" (Césaire, qtd. in Fanon 154). In respect to Césaire's former citation and its latter resolution, it is my interpretation, that Helen's metaphorical feet-(un)masking-ritual alludes to the establishment that whiteness cannot be appropriated or mastered; instead, "[i]n the blinding light of whiteness" Helen (and John) were forced to "[walk] exposed: pale, vulnerable geckos whose very skeletal systems showed through transparent flesh" (Wicomb 123). What is more, Helen's double consciousness becomes highly evident when, the game of racial passing cannot be controlled, and hence Helen loses

herself. As a result, I would like to imply that her underestimation of the game's rules reveals a "psychic structure that is in danger of disintegration" (Fanon 74).

In agreement with this notion, Laue states that Helen experiences "an internal division at the core of her being", which causes her psychosomatic illness (123). Fanon addresses the division of one's being in psychiatric terms as a form of "psychosis that [becomes] overt as the result of a traumatic experience" (62). Indeed, towards the end of her life Helen develops additional neurotic behaviors, "muttering to herself" and replaying in her mind the "achievements, the decisions, processes, petitions [...] but she did not remember the visits to Councilor Carter" (Wicomb 148). What is more, Helen talks to an imaginary "friend who ask[s] helpful questions" and prompts her thoughts, a condition of typical schizophrenia or madness that Helen denies; for this reason, the friend "remained nameless" (Wicomb 149). Reading her earlier years of 'playing white', Helen develops phobias, insecurities, and antisocial behaviors as well due to all the precautions she had to implement in fear of being discovered or demoted to a colored identity. Hesnard defines phobia as "a neurosis" which "before attacking the adult beliefs" – in this case, Helen's belief system encompassing whiteness – is linked to "the elements of the infantile structure which produced them" ((*L'univers morbide de la jaune*, 37, qtd. in Fanon; Fanon 119).

From the very few recollections of Helen's childhood through others' narratives and memories, one is yet unmistakably made aware of the culturally present principles of white supremacy and the devaluation of colouredness, a condition that characterizes the coloured community of Wuppertal during apartheid. Mrs. Karelse, for instance, proud of her daughter's paleness, "rosy cheeks", and "frizz"-free-"copper"-tinted- hair, would employ Helen's beauty to display "those distant genes from Europe" for other to admire (Wicomb 132, 95). In this manner, Mrs. Karelse replicates Fanon's inferiority complex by disavowing blackness and the disgrace of a "black child" (146). Her behavior emphasizes with regard to Helen's upbringing in the coloured community the fact that the members of her fellowship would have already internalized an ideology not only of 'white beauty' but of whiteness in generic terms. Thus, spending her childhood in such an oppressive environment originating from the anxieties of that time and extending through the "institution of family", my assumption of Helen's later obsession with Englishness, whiteness, and high-class is given material elements (115).

Notwithstanding that Helen's past is of crucial importance when read in relation to Fanon's diagnosis of neurosis, psychological trauma is a primary condition for the

development of psychosis, as previously stated. The most prominent occurrence of such a traumatic encounter is Helen's sexual subjugation to the quests of Councilor Carter in her pursuit of official white identity. That incident, further analyzed, reveals the correlation between the actual encounter, Helen's compulsion to obliterate the memory in order to regain power, and finally the repression of the memory or amnesia (148). Observing the inferiority complex, the traumatic experience of Helen's sexual trauma is "expelled from [her] consciousness and [her] memory", functioning as a defensive mechanism against "suffering" (Fanon 111). Nevertheless, her "repressed" memory, which she presumes has been obliterated after her white-washing, remains hidden in her unconscious until "an opportunity" would arise when it could "make itself known" (Fanon 111). The opportunity of which Fanon speaks could be Marion's departure in pursuit of a University education since it is right after this event that the narrator informs the reader of Helen's regression to neuroticism (Wicomb 148). Thereby, this incident could have evoked the repression that returned "into [her] consciousness", but in an alternate and unrecognizable form (Fanon 111). The repressed is substituted with a "surrogate", presenting "itself with all those feelings of morbidity" – in other words, with cancer (Fanon 111). Thus, the repressed sacrifice that traumatizes Helen in her game of 'playing in the light' also lays bare her obsession with 'higher whiteness', or in other words pointing back to both Fanon and Césaire, her blackness – which she had to kill. Therefore, Helen dies a "self-willed" and "efficient death" (Wicomb 4).

Hence, it is only through a retrospective analysis of Helen Charles' story after her demise that the puzzle of her psychosis and mental illness can be fully understood in Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light*. Having being brought up in racist apartheid South Africa, Helen's burdensome and neurotic desire to "annihilate [her] own presence" and to make her colouredness disappear is of central importance to the narrative and has been unfortunately neglected (Fanon 43). This analysis, however, has argued that the duality of her death – that is, the physical discontinuity of Helen's strife to become white and her ultimate attainment of whiteness through "nonexistence" – is the sole "efficient" materialization of her wish and the irony of apartheid's Population Registration Act of 1950 (Fanon 106).

4. Marion Campbell: The doom of Whiteness

In light of my psychoanalytical reading of Helen Charles, this chapter aims to suggest that Marion's mental particularities, before uncovering her origins are emblematic of the delusional superiority of whiteness that persists in South Africa during the post-apartheid-era, and which unconsciously resemble Helen's own neuroticism with high-class whiteness and Englishness during the heyday of apartheid. Elaborating on Fanon and Freud's preeminence of infantile development in adult neurosis, my analysis will assume that Marion's symbolic anxieties of the traumas of apartheid emanate from her restrictive and confined childhood. Last but not least, considering Fanon's cautious reminder that "the neurotic's fate remains in his own hands", this chapter will attempt to prevent a diminution of Marion's agency by acknowledging her placement in a wider temporal spectrum with its sociocultural junctures (4).

A reading of the opening chapter of *Playing in the Light* may erroneously convey the impression that Marion Campbell is indeed a vigorous member of her society since it introduces her as an accomplished and independent woman; the well-off business owner of "MCTravel" (16); and the resident of a highly "secure" and "inviolable" apartment, the "interiors [of which] seem[ed] to spring from the glossy pages" of "*Home and Garden* magazines" (2). However, Wicomb's astute presentation of the protagonist at the novel's outset as a sufferer of recurring panic "attacks" (3); haunting nightmares (29); anti-social behaviors (3); and phobias (40), could be construed contrary to the image of a mature and self-made woman.

Indeed, it could be assumed that this initial encounter with the protagonist is foregrounding the granted dominance of whiteness in a racially biased town, thus underlining Marion's compliancy with South Africa's dominant race and emphasizing her inactive status. Robolin's informative article prompts one to note that the narrator's classist description of Marion's persona and the disclosure of her anxious panic attacks are suggestive of what this critic phrases as an invitation to an "exploration of both the physical and psychological contours of Marion's life" (352). I would like to suggest that Marion's upper-middle-class

status and entitlement to a self-controlled life could be said to symbolize the protagonist's adamant "confiden[ce] in her whiteness" and the unconscious duplication of Helen's neuroticism – to which I wish now to turn (132).

In accordance with Robolin's suggestion to explore the interiors of Marion's "cocooned" walls, it is easy to decipher the young woman's preference for high-class furnishing as illustrated in "English magazine[s]" (2). The same principles are applied in meticulously decorating the premises of her company "to the letter" after "style feature[s]" that "she followed" "in *Cosmopolitan*" (35). Although Marion clearly despises the "effete, English types" (3), "the idle rich, women of leisure" (25), I would like to propose that her preference for English vogue unconsciously reiterates her mother's, which can be traced back to her childhood home where Helen's "hysterical" demand for "arrangement" of "roses" (6), "lace" (125) "curtains" (10) and "broderie anglaise" (125) prevails. Along parallel lines, De Michellis has noted that Marion's lavish apartment with the "fairy princess" bed "a house in itself" (Wicomb 2) and her office which she aspired to give "a homely touch" (Wicomb 38) are "emblem[s] of Marion's state of denial and misidentification with whiteness" (72-73). To elaborate on this further, Marion's displaced desire for high-class, often English, materialism that she acquires from Helen can be also detected in her disguised fixation with "security" (2); "neatness" (16); "order" (16); and control which is "her prerogative: determining where things go" (16).

Regardless that De Michellis's argument is limited to the protagonist's obsession with class as a result of Helen's suppression in their "secretive home", it is my belief that Marion's regulating compulsions are the manifestation of an anxiety disorder (72-73). When paying close attention to her detailed movements in her environments, Marion "rearranges"; "her eyes sweep across the room"; notices the "bunched up into the corner" curtain (10); "checks again for that which might have escaped her" (16); until "order has been restored" (16). Then again, she is sensitive to touch (van Heerden 90) and "dubious hygiene" (40), and "rolls" the "dead guinea fowl" with "her foot" (1). Marion would rather eliminate the presence of lesser lives at her father's "garden" that "needs tidying up" as well (12); she finds the inhabitation of "rodents" (24), "mice, rats, snakes" (13) and "flies" repellent, but "she wouldn't like to trip over dead bodies" (15). Notwithstanding that such behaviors are typically translated into an Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and bear a resemblance to Helen's neurotic attitudes as presented in the previous section, it can be additionally inferred that at their core lies the

psycho-dramatic burden of whiteness. Simply put, these oppressive attitudes to which Marion abstractedly submits are a result of the sum of all the careful maneuvers that Helen's imagined idea of whiteness requires.

Nonetheless, Marion's unconscious replication of the moral suasion of a racially charged apartheid South Africa gains climactic momentum as she suspects Brenda, her black employee, to have disturbed her office's order, but then revises her initial contemplation as "the kind of prejudiced stuff her parents were prone to, the nonsense with which that generation burdened themselves" (17). Esteeming Brenda's "bent towards the pedagogic" (19), Marion feels "a twinge of guilt" for her speculations and after all, "[t]he girl ha[d] turned out to be reliable and conscientious" (18). Her reconsideration, however, shifts her prejudice from matters of color to that of social ranking in post-apartheid Cape Town – exactly as Helen had indoctrinated her. Thus, incognizant of the burden of her own bias due to her masked whiteness, her racist tendencies are made explicit in her use of derogatory language, when for instance referring to the working class "skollies" (28), as "a flock of unsavoury people" – the "opportunistic layabouts of Cape Town" (25) – whom she reduces to a homogeneous group of "such people" (1). Further, her flat's 'white' topography aims to perpetuate the maintenance of her white identity and her clear segregation from a lower social economy, alluding to Helen's sensitive selection of "a decent area" (Wicomb 130).

Yet, her enigmatic seclusion signals major anti-social tendencies, which according to van Heerden should be regarded as defense mechanisms to protect Marion's privacy, and which the protagonist attributes to "CHAOS", or the "Can't Have Anyone Over Syndrome" (Wicomb 71). Although I concur with the interrogating argument of a social anxiety disorder at the root of Marion's isolation, I would like to stress her replication of Helen's reclusive and solitary tactics, that is, her mother's defensive mechanisms in fear of their family's unmasking. Such an interpretation allows for Marion's phobic fear of intrusion into her private life to be found not only in Helen's "refus[al] to socialize" (131), but in Marion's finite childhood friendships as well – for example with "Annie Boshoff" which Helen prohibited, claiming that "children should keep to their own families" (61).

Yet, the most conspicuous resemblance to Helen's neuroticism is, in my opinion, Marion's obsession with her profession. Zuhmboshi attempts to defend Marion's scrupulous working methods as a dedication to her company's vision (125):

On the pad on her desk is a list of tasks for Monday morning that she might as well get started on; but she is restless, perhaps because it is getting on for Saturday evening in a city decanted of people—people who are readying themselves for the elusive pleasure of the night. (Wicomb 15)

However, in light of Marion's asocial preferences, as previously mentioned, her eschewal of common and healthy social gatherings and entertainment in favor of completing her "list of tasks" is equally symbolic of her distorted and obsessive conception of "hard wor[k]", which functions as another type of insulation (Wicomb 25). What is more, it recapitulates Helen's incessant activities to sustain her family's white identity that proved to be fatal. Analogously, Marion's workaholicism can be argued to embody Helen's restlessness, which further signifies the inquisitorial regime of apartheid that required "vigilance and continual assessment" of one's "reinvention" (Wicomb 131).

Marion's sense of a white identity could be generated out of a discriminatory belief system against colouredness that her mother's unorthodox upbringing methods reinforced. I believe that this is made evident when her mother, who is highly responsible for her daughter's application of white "etiquette" considers this to be her "achievement" (139); even more "her legacy to Marion, a new generation unburdened by the past" (150). Frantz Fanon in his much-quoted work *Black Skin/White Masks* terms this process "lactification", explaining that the mother who aspires to be white, that is Helen, attains not only to establish her own whiteness, but must ensure the saving of "the race [which] must be whitened" (33). As a result, Helen's short and anxious existence, which personifies the peril of apartheid, as previously stated, is undeniably driven by making "sure that [her daughter's world] will be white." (Fanon 33).

Following Helen's neurosis to extract consequential insights to Marion's childhood, Fanon's psychoanalytic framework deduces that "behavior patterns – within the specific group" are representations of "the family" (Fanon 109). When neuroticism manifests itself in the adult subject – Helen as already stated and later Marion as it will be shown in the next chapter – then in the "psychic structure" there must be "an analogy with certain infantile elements, a repetition, a duplication [...] that owe their origin to [...] the family constellation" (Fanon 109). Similar to my former explanation of Helen's conduct that reiterates Mrs. Karelse's, alias Tokkie's nurturing methods, the child Marion's mimicking of her parents' manners reaffirms that "society is indeed the sum of all the families in it" (Fanon 115). Erasmus defines this in terms of "creolization", or "*bricolage*", that "involves the construction of identity out of elements of ruling as well as subaltern cultures" "which are made and re-

made by coloured people themselves in their attempts to give meaning to their everyday lives” (16).

As such, it can be concluded that in their distinct chronological placements in history Helen and Tokkie’s characters are agents of their own existential anxieties that were induced by apartheid’s schematics of valorizing whiteness. Therefore, their “cultural borrowing” of subaltern miscegenational and simultaneously dominant European or English traits leads to the creation of an adult Marion, who in spite of her own agency in post-apartheid Cape Town, unconsciously replicates the tenebrous motherly figures of her past. As such, the child Marion who “emerges from the shadows of [her] parents” echoes Helen, the child (Fanon 109). Observing Fanon’s theory of sociogeny per se and Erasmus’ synopsis of bricolage, it can be deciphered that the two characters “find [themselves] once more among the same laws, the same principles, the same values” of their ancestors (Fanon 109).

Moreover, in my psychoanalytical reading of Helen Charles’ narrative, certain references to the primary text concerning her psychotic tactics are all expressive of Helen’s impulse to *lactify* (see Fanon’s theory of lactification) or to purify the young girl’s coloured roots in favor of “respectable whiteness” masked in Englishness (131). In more colloquial terms, these forceful machinations in Marion’s upbringing reflect Fanon’s sociogenesis and Mandela’s theorizing of Englishness as not a kith-and-kin condition that is bequeathed upon conception, but rather as an ambivalent identity that must be acquired or rejected by being taught (*Empire and After: Englishness in Postcolonial Perspective* 68). The imposed and distressful methods of her mother, however, prompt the protagonist to disdain the “indulgent, effete, English types” (3) in opposition to the “hard-working middle class that she admire[d], which is to say people like herself” (25).

Even so, in her later years, Marion continues to be unable to explain why “[h]er parents were always meticulous, neurotic really” (10). All the recollections of her younger self are weighted by feelings of piteousness for her dear father’s lack of education and humble origins; they even project emotions of sympathy for her self-made mother. These affectionate emotions for her mother are rather swiftly transformed into resentment. Ignorant of their play-white-act, Marion’s “sympathy fades” (47) as she ascribes “the gloom and silence of her childhood, the air of restraint,” to Helen and John’s “marital misery,” (47) and domestic “hermetic” “secrecy” (60). Such vexatious images appear to arise in one of her “homecomings” to her father’s house, which as Dash argues “revive[s] memories of how

displaced and unwelcomed she felt in that home even as a child” (141). Marais and Olausen similarly emphasize that the house’s almost incarcerating features function so as to keep the young child isolated from the neighborly surroundings in fear of uncovering her family’s colouredness (171; 154-155). Unable to contain the nature of the Campbells’ secrecy, Marion becomes envious of her friend Annie’s house:

As a child she hated their street, the terraced houses so close to the pavement, where families distinguished themselves from their neighbours by painting their doors in violently clashing colours. [...] Marion would have preferred to live above the Main Road, close to Annie Boshoff. Those verandahed stoeps, edged with broekielace, were wrapped around at least two sides of the house, so that people could spend all day outside in the ambiguous space between private house and public street [...] At Marion’s house, with the mean, verandahless strip of stoep that slipped without as much as a path straight into the street, they kept indoors, even in summer. (Wicomb 8–9)

Although Marion’s antipathy for her childhood house’s interior and exterior confinement is highlighted in this quote, the protagonist remains oblivious to Helen’s camouflaged admonitions. Incapable of translating the “burnt pitch black” skin of “mad Mr Moolman[’s]” colouredness and the mermaids’ hybridity into her own potentiality of turning black if she disobeyed her mother’s rebuking “to keep out of the sun” (9), Marion is terrorized by the nonsensical impetus of whiteness and is overwhelmed by emotions of “remorse” (61). The shame that her mother ascribes to blackness is internalized as “guilt” (61). My interpretation of Helen’s restrictive measures to prevent Marion’s skin from darkening is that it would have caused “[b]lackness” to grow as “the symbol of Evil and Ugliness” in the child’s mind – “an image of physical dirtiness” and madness – which Helen’s own idealization of whiteness, influenced by the ideology of white supremacy, had produced (Fanon 139, 146). In contrast, the brightness of the girl’s undisputed white reality – *her* inescapable reality – dazzles her from recognizing her family’s imposter identity and their neuroticism, causing Marion’s childish mind to ponder why “other people did not live in silence” (61).

In her adult life in Cape Town, Marion’s perception of her early years prevails unaltered. After the disclosure of a series of panic attacks in the opening of her narrative, Marion’s musing reveals a double consciousness that originates in those “peculiar childhood” (3) memories. In psychoanalytic theory, this confirms the protagonist’s “behavior patterns” to be found in an early stage of life that originate from a “family constellation”, as Fanon remarks (109). Specifically, Marion regards her panic attacks, that is, her “insecurity” as a non-gendered and “obvious” “human condition” for which her “older parents” – and especially her “mother”, “like all mothers” – were “responsible” (3). Despite the negligence

of such “not serious” (3) outbreaks that she attributes to work-related-exhaustion, Marion’s naive contemplation is rather indicative of her ignorance of “repressed” “memories” (Fanon 111). Critically, the association of her mental instability with Helen betokens a problematic mother-daughter relationship and symptomatically points to the true source of her psychological dissonance. Freud explains this ambiguous mother-daughter relationship in terms of parental “enmity” that stems from unfulfilled “wishes” (83) and is most evident “between mother and daughter” (84), which he ascribes to the Oedipal complex (84). In agreement with Fanon, Freud’s elaborate discussion concludes that the young girl may “resent” or even express a desire for the passing of the mother, “the origin” of which can be traced “in the earliest years of childhood” (84).

Marion’s resentment of her mother is clearly shown when the narrator declares Helen’s death to have been a “self-willed and efficient death” (Wicomb 4) for which Marion was thankful. In light of this statement and her childhood traumatic experiences of “endless rules and restrictions and excessive fears”, as already discussed (60), Marion’s “hat[e]” for Helen in opposition to “falling in love with” John mirrors her oedipal complex tendencies and could be considered “as the material of the subsequent neurosis” (Freud 85). In my opinion, regardless of their ambiguous father-daughter relationship with its “uneasy edge to their love, a fringe of cloud perhaps” (3), her “dear Pappa” (4) epitomizes Marion’s childish hybrid freedom from the sociopolitical enslavement or doom of whiteness to which Helen had succumbed. In other words, during these early years, due to her childhood innocence, Marion has not yet internalized the superiority of whiteness that apartheid encourages. Therefore, she easily bonds with her father who is less inclined to his white identity and not as strict or obsessive as her mother.

On the other hand, the tension in Helen and Marion’s relation is exacerbated by the protagonist’s recurring nightmares in her Cape Town luxurious flat. Denoting Freudian dream interpretation, the young woman feels “compelled to tell” (Wicomb 31) her dreams to her employees in “hope that, in the telling, the dream will release [...] meanings; [...] details inaccessible in silent recollection” (Wicomb 29). Her dreams specifically revolve around the presence of a black figure that “triggers the memory of [...] Tokkie” (31), their “servant”, who Marion remembers vividly to “lov[e]” and “spoi[l]” her (32), but who unfortunately died due to old age (33); and her mother, Helen. Tokkie’s unmourned death, however, proves to be a traumatic event for the child, since no one ever “sp[o]ke about it or put their arms around

each other” (33). In accordance with Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), although Marion attempts to detect “the key to the dream” by publicly discussing it (Wicomb 30), her inability to extract details from the “source” of the dream “is to be found in childhood” years – particularly in the dream “wishes” “of infantile origin” that “exis[t] in repression” (Freud 6, 7, 173). In other words, her nightmares are “the (disguised) fulfillment of a (suppressed, repressed) wish”, that is, her longing for the motherly figure that Tokkie comes to represent – in contrast to Helen, whom she disdains, as previously mentioned (Freud 55). Klopper responds to this story of mourning and “the displaced body of the mother”, supporting the novel’s dialogue with such a “psychoanalytic allegory” (154).

In conclusion, Marion’s dreaming of Helen’s preemptive action to prevent her from reaching Tokkie can be read metaphorically as an emblem of the chasm between whiteness and blackness that the child must never discover (31). Marion’s hatred for her mother can also be said to signal her repulsion of Helen’s obsession with whiteness and the racially charged regime of apartheid. This is made clear from the onset of the novel, where the protagonist overtly dissociates her persona from her mother’s, mentioning that “she is not Helen” and therefore does not duplicate her mother’s behaviors (54). Nonetheless, in light of the previous chapter, this section has emphasized that the uncontested belief in her whiteness blinds Marion from translating her own mental illness and anxieties as the unconscious reiteration of her mother’s neuroticism. Hence, Marion transfers the doom of apartheid and racial passing to contemporary Cape Town and verifies apartheid’s objective to “obliterate the *truth*” (Marais 179).

5. Marion Campbell: In Search of a New Self

Marion Campbell's psychological distress following her discovery of Helen and John's racial passing under the Population Registration Act of 1950 has been discussed extensively in previous research. In order to prevent unnecessary repetitions, my psychoanalytical reading of the character at this point will focus on Marion's psycho-traumatic experiences while observing the journey to her origins that evokes an ontological crisis after her encounter with the image of Williams. A comparative perspective to Helen's psychological traumas will continue to direct the development of my arguments as her narrative is emblematic of apartheid times, pointing back to Marion's repressed childhood memories, while emphasizing the conditions of post-apartheid Africa that rendered Marion more capable than her mother to rise above her 'whiteness' and to embark on a secondary journey of assuming a hybrid identity.

Marion's encounter with a "large colour photograph of a young woman" (48), "Patricia Williams" (49), the face of "[a]nother TRC story" (49), "hisses a command to remember" (54), recalling just as in her dreams' repressed memories of Tokkie, "the old coloured servant who indulged her as a child" (54-56). Sealed and confident in her whiteness, Marion's impotency to imagine any connection to the dark-skinned woman is in agreement with Fanon's explanation of the Jungian association of "the foreign with the obscure" (Fanon 147). Fanon maintains that in the case of encountering "something unheard of, something reprehensible" the individual (Marion) is given "only one solution: to get rid of it" by ascribing "its origin to someone else" in order to "eliminate" any threat to her "equilibrium" (147). In this sense, Marion's encounter with an unknown face that yet resembles a familiar person is displaced due to her conviction of her white heritage, which cannot but lead her to suspect that "she is an adopted child" and Tokkie is not related to her origins but a sole participant in the process (62). This vision of Tokkie is in my opinion an expression of Fanon's explanation of repressed memories acquired in childhood. On this ground, the memory is but a trauma in Marion's child-psyche that produced "much of [her] anxiety" (140).

To elaborate on this further, Marion's earlier nightmares of the dark figure that "threaten[ed] to materialize" are according to Freudian dream interpretation "a relic of prophetic significance" – "the dream concerns itself chiefly with the future, whose form it surmises in advance" (Wicomb 30; Freud 36). Analogously, Tokkie's uncanny haunting and her obscure relation to the family is a symbolic "marker of that which has been repressed in Marion's family archive [...] and by the anachronic drive within the apartheid archive" (Van der Vlies 392). Thus, it can be concluded that Tokkie's complicity in perpetuating the doom of whiteness has been embedded in Helen and John's play-white-game and subsequently has been imparted to their daughter through her identification with South Africa's dominant race. In my opinion, Tokkie's sudden appearance via means of the dream content and her resemblance to William's face (even the reverse can be true) that reminds Marion of her true origins is Wicomb's witty interface between the future unmasking property of the novel via means of the past recollection of Marion's personal conformity.

The burden of history takes the form of another panic attack when Marion finds herself "trapped in endless folds of muslin", exerting "superhuman effort [...] to escape", while "the room [would] shrink around her" (54). Marion's obsession with the image of Williams and the memory of Tokkie – that alludes to Helen's neurotic belief system – demands answers that John refuses to provide and thus the psychologically distressed woman reaches out to Brenda for help, who finally guides her to Wuppertal (40). There, in a feet soaking scene, Mrs. Murray, "like seeing a spook," realizes that Marion looks like "the spitting image of Mrs Karelse" (97). Although Mrs. Murray exclaims to have been spooked, it is, in reality, Marion who has been overshadowed by a moment of self-realization.

In contrast to Helen's white-washing experience of reinvention – as stated in the previous chapter – Marion's moment of truth is a negative exposure to inconsistencies in the version of her past that triggered an explicit psychosomatic collapse. Disguised in decent whiteness the phantom of apartheid's racist regime and the colonial history of racial erasure abruptly begin to interrogate Marion's only sense of identity vis-a-vis her falsified existence, causing her to question her understanding of the self:

Marion tries to nod, but has a feeling that her head hasn't moved, that she has no control over it, that in fact it is not her own, Marion is drained she wants to protest but can't [...] She, Brenda, will drive [...] [Marion] hangs the head that hurts and yet does not belong to her, fixes her eyes on the black fabric of her trousers; she does not recognise her voice, does not recognise the linen-clad legs on which her eyes have come to rest. But she will not break down in the presence of the unsympathetic person who is driving her car. No, she says to herself, over and over; she will not break down (Wicomb 97- 99).

Marion's loss of control as described in the passage duplicates Fanon's experience of 'depersonalization' as narrated in *Black Skin/White Masks*:

I took myself far off from my own presence [...] and made myself an object. [...] an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood? [...] I already knew that there were [...] stories, history, and above all *historicity*, [...] the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema. [...] I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. [...] I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by [...] racial defects, slave-ships [...] But I rejected all immunization of the emotions. I wanted to be a man, nothing but a man. Some identified me with ancestors of mine who had been enslaved [...] —I was the grandson of slaves [...] (Fanon 84-85)

Almost identical to Fanon's emotions of self-annihilation, Marion's self-alienation is the result of a role reversal from being the possessor of her "head", meaning the proprietor of her mnemonic history, to suffering the displacement of her gaze, which is replaced by the position of an external observer possessed by *historicity*. Simply put, in the backdrop of apartheid's racist and cultural ideologies, Marion's falsified white-upbringing is exposed through Mrs. Murray's gaze. As a result, the ownership of her white reality crumbles – her whiteness having being unmasked – in the presence of 'history', that is, the decades of racial oppression that led to apartheid and the play-white-game. On the other hand, Marion's dissociative limbo of "voice" loss mirrors Fanon's correlation of using a "certain [language] syntax" with the ability to "assume a culture" and "to support the weight of civilization", which in the case of Marion conversely emphasizes her inability to endure this burden (8) – she repeats "over and over to herself" that "she will not break down" (Wicomb 99). This could be symbolic of her effort to remain in control and to not allow herself to succumb to Brenda's gaze; a fact that Ateh Laue in his study of Sartre's gaze has neglected. Even so, indicative of the traumatic implications of her parents' racial passing, this liminal state allows for the imposition of historical narratives of black heritage, miscegenation, slavery, and shame on her internalized superior white existence, splattering her "whole body with black blood" (Fanon 85). Validating simultaneously Mrs. Murray's identification of Marion with her "ancestors" (Fanon 84) – that is the "dark-skinned" (Wicomb 94) "Karelses [who] were "decent people" of the Wuppertal community and the "Plaatjies, [who] were originally from Boland" (Wicomb 95) – the interpretation of the feet-washing-scene in light of Fanon's dislocation theory carries analogies to the "racial epidermal schema[ta]" (Fanon 84) of apartheid. Particularly, Helen and John's fantasy of having "history on their side" is disputed, since their

ancestral history of coloured skin continues to haunt their and Marion's masked whiteness (Wicomb 131).

This haunting is further accentuated upon Marion's return to her "unhomely" flat accompanied by Brenda, where her troubled psyche yields to an intense "nightmare" (Dass 140; Wicomb 100). Brenda who stays the night over

[...] is woken by Marion's eerie cries [...] the woman thrashes, moans, and weeps [...] Brenda [reaches] to soothe her, to try to wake her up. Marion clutches at the hand [...] It would seem that she can't be woken out of her dream. She sits upright, stares wildly, and screams something that Brenda can make no sense of. [...] Marion clings to her, until the taut, arched body finally stops shaking and the breathing subsides. [...] Brenda explains about the nightmare, of which Marion has no memory. (Wicomb 100-101)

Here, I would like to note that the neurotic nature of Marion's nightmares is in fact a manifestation of what Freud terms 'pavor nocturnus' or 'night terrors' – which has been neglected in previous studies (182). Keith identifies pavor nocturnus as a "dramatic occurrence" during sleep that is characterized by acute "tachycardia"; "irregular breathing"; "sweating"; "fear"; "crying or screaming"; "bizarre acts" or "bodily movement"; "nonreactivity to external stimuli" or "no response to effort to provoke [...] wakefulness"; and "disorganized verbalizations", followed in the morning by "retrograde" "amnesia for the entire event" (477-478). "Traumatic type" night terrors originate in "acute trauma, physical or emotional" and "is related to the dreams of adults with traumatic neuroses" (Keith 482). Notwithstanding that Marion is traumatized both physically by twisting her foot and emotionally by the overwhelming revelation of her origins, I believe that Wicomb's attentive description of the scene in psychological register, insinuating traumatic neurosis, emphasizes Marion's assimilation of her mother's neuroticism.

My analysis of Helen's mental illness has explicitly demonstrated how the woman is led to obsessive neuroticism after having been sexually traumatized by Councilor Carter's requests, who is representative of the monstrous demands of whiteness during apartheid. Comparatively, it can be inferred that Marion's own traumatic exposure to the doom of whiteness through her parents' racial passing is the materialization of the unceasing impetus of apartheid in post-apartheid Cape Town and the root of her developing neuroticism. As if caught in the battle of ages, i.e. *in medias res* of a transitional period between apartheid times and post-apartheid-New-South-Africa, Marion's upbringing "without the burden of history" (152) has been gaining momentum since her white childhood years until a series of uncanny

events in adolescence evokes the repressed, thus culminating in this moment of “terrible emptiness” – a feeling of nothingness, of cognitive dissonance (102).

Van Heerden expands on this perspective by elaborating on the succeeding scene of Marion’s contemplation over the skins of peaches:

Marion scrapes together the skins into a sorry pile. She stares at her peach; she cannot bring herself to eat it. Naked, slippery – that’s me, that’s who I am, she thinks. Hurling into the world fully grown, without a skin. [...]. She chants: Skin and bone, by the skin of one’s teeth, skinflint, skin deep like beauty, thick skinned, thin skinned – can’t think of any more skins. (Wicomb 101)

Van Heerden’s interpretation of ‘skin’ illuminates the “artificiality of the metaphorical skins of white insulation” that her parents’ had espoused, that is, the masking properties of whiteness (97). My understanding of Marion’s self-alienation in relation to *Black Skin/ White Masks* is similarly concretized by the layering of skins as portrayed in the “[n]aked, slippery” peaches (97) – which further elucidates the applicability of Fanon’s racial epidermal schema[ta] or the internalization of the skin’s inferiority (epidermalization) with reference to Marion’s condition. What is more, her effort to “spell out the word, whatever it may be: Grandmother, Grandma, Granny, Ouma, Mamma” relates the shame of epidermalization to the protagonist’s perception of “a new word, naked and slippery with shame” (Wicomb 107; 159; 97). Such an interpretation places additional emphasis on what Fanon describes as the ability to support the “weight of civilization” by grasping “the morphology” of language, which is displayed in Marion’s need to re-create her perception of the world with new words (Fanon 8).

This deconstruction of the world in racial terms appears nonetheless to confuse her, “[t]he difference – that is what Marion cannot get her head around”; “How can things be the same, and yet be different?” (Wicomb 106). Although referring to John and Helen’s racial passing in the “past” during apartheid that “[was] pot-bellied with meaning”, for Marion in the “new era of unremitted crossings” “there can be no question of returning to [that place]” but to “keep crossing to and fro” (106-107). Thus, the display of her ontological anxiety when Marion “vehemently” declares “[m]y parents were the play-whites; *they* crossed over. I was white” (Wicomb 106-107), in my opinion resembles Fanon’s statement “[t]here is no help for it: *I am* a white man. For unconsciously I distrust what is black in me, that is, the whole of my being” (emphasis mine, 148). As such, the “futility” of her parents’ play-white-game further reflects what I have termed the *doom of whiteness* that prevents the reconciliation of the two identities and generates a double consciousness at the very core of one’s psyche (162; 152).

Next, it can be argued that Wicomb's deconstruction and unmasking of whiteness are set in motion with this "question of time, the arrival of a moment when you cross a boundary", offering a critique of South Africa's two eras and their traumatic consequences (106). However, Marion's realization that "[o]nce I was white, now I am coloured", raises another significant question: "will the past be different too?" (106). The use of Fanonian deconstruction to allude to Marion's nakedness when unmasked of her fraudulent white skin as previously mentioned places the character in the "zone of nonbeing [...] an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born" (2). Her placement in this zone is shown through Marion's problematization of her entire existence and white upbringing during the racially constructed regime of apartheid, and her disability to comprehend her positioning as coloured in the new realities of post-apartheid South Africa – which, however, triggered an exploration of the classificatory archive at the National Library.

Marion, assisted by a librarian, attempts to "find out about play whites", but unfortunately "there are no entries for play-whites" – "[p]lay-white [...] must be a condition of whiteness; but whiteness itself, according to the library's classification system, is not a category for investigation" (120). As a result, the women begin to investigate the different Amendments passed during apartheid, inferring that it "[m]ust have been a hell of a confusing time [...] when whiteness was not yet properly defined" (121). In the context of the illusiveness of whiteness, former scholarship has extensively analyzed "the idea of the archive in relation to apartheid experience and to the construction of race" (Van der Vlies 584). More specifically, Olausen's study concludes that John and Helen's complicity perpetuated the system of racial classification, while Ateh Laue adds that this system of rigid and dichotomous structure "enacts, as a metaphor and microcosm, the organisation of the apartheid state" (153; 130). Yet, while reading the Amendments that seem incomprehensible, Marion and the librarian's "laughter", personifies the nullity of whiteness, while disregarding the tragedy of play-whites as "nonsense" of "all ancient history" (121). Here, in order to conclude that whiteness is an illusion of nothingness – thus cannot amount to anything but 'flamboyant' neuroticism – I would like to propose that Wicomb's engagement with the archive has the explicit aim to simultaneously critique South Africa's nonsensical apartheid regime that enabled racial passing (despite the privileges that it offered to racial passers) and the play-white act as an unavailing masking of an imaginative condition.

In contrast to Helen's fatal 'flamboyant' obsession with "this chimerical thing" – "[t]he pursuit of [which] [was] in competition with history" – Marion's positioning in post-apartheid Cape Town granted her resources inaccessible to the previous generation, which in my opinion enables her to negotiate her colouredness in accordance with the historical unraveling of events (Wicomb 152). For Marion, "being white, black, or coloured means nothing" in the cosmopolitan South Africa after 1994; while for her parents in the 50's and 60's "vigilance is everything; to achieve whiteness is to keep on your toes" (105; 152). Additionally, Marion's wealth and education in opposition to Helen and John's poverty and illiteracy opens doors of opportunities to, for instance, associate with black South African businessmen, to travel unhindered by economic limitations, and to embrace literature.

Having been significantly traumatized by the unmasking of her pseudo-whiteness, the protagonist's need for reinvention requires the transcendence of her luxurious former existence. "After journeying into the mind" through exhaustive contemplation as Ateh Laue argues, the young Capetonian is able to overcome her aversion to travel and hence embarks on a journey to Europe and the United Kingdom – which the critic terms an "intellectual journey" (130). However, Ateh Laue has neglected the fact that Marion's decision to travel was made available to her through a deconstructive 'psychic journey' into her childhood via means of the repressed, leading to the discovery of whiteness's fragility, before she could experience the purifying power of grieving. This is evidently portrayed in her reading of South African novels that she had previously despised and which now appeared to illuminate her as to "how many versions of her exist in the stories of her country" that makes her sob (190-191). Uninterested in the sights that London had to offer, Marion once more barricades herself in a "cocooned single room [...] a place in which to cry [...] [where] the world imprints itself on her afresh; her days are rinsed in rain" (191). Marion's "bleakness of days" that was "rinsed in rain" and mourning could be said to compensate for the former negative feet-washing experience that recovered her colouredness (191). This latter rain-washing scene can additionally be compared to Helen's feet-washing ceremony, revealing her newly acquired identity.

Nonetheless, the process of grieving in the darkroom for "representations of herself", in the likeness of a depressive episode evokes the return of the repressed which brings to light Annie Boschhoff's betrayal, thus marking Marion's complicity in perpetuating the doom of *higher whiteness* and accentuating her assimilation with Helen (Wicomb 193). At this

instance, Marion is faced with the same dilemma that Fanon expresses in *Black Skin/ White Masks*:

In order to terminate this neurotic situation, in which I am compelled to choose an unhealthy, conflictual solution, fed on fantasies, hostile, inhuman in short, I have only one solution: to rise above this absurd drama that others have staged round me, to reject the two terms that are equally unacceptable, and, through one human being, to reach out for the universal. (Fanon 153)

In other words, in order to avoid fatal neuroticism like her mother, Marion has to denounce the history of pseudo-whiteness, racial passing, and the abominations of apartheid, as well as to exit the cycle of racial violence – whether her placement in history is that of a direct actor or an unconscious perpetrator. Consequently, she has to repudiate the confines of “[...] terms that are equally unacceptable” – such as whiteness, colouredness, and/or blackness – and to embrace her hybridity, or the notion of Fanon’s “universal” (Fanon 153). Marion’s internal transition towards this new self is revealed when she is first tempted to sexually engage with Vumile Mkhize, a former play-white; then considers giving up her fancy apartment to live with her father; and finally when she transforms her speech by acknowledging the individuality of her co-Capetonians. Hence, it can be said that Marion finally manages to “carry the weight of [her] civilization” (Fanon 8).

To sum up, unlike previous studies, this chapter has concluded that Marion’s journey to finding her origins is of a ‘psychic’ nature, meaning that the revocation of repressed childhood memories is inseparable from the protagonist’s mental disequilibrium. Specifically, my analysis has shown that Marion’s ontological crisis is highly suggestive of mental adversity since it manifests itself not only in the form of panic attacks and nightmares, as it has been previously argued by critics, but also in the form of night terrors and a depressive episode. Unique in its argumentation, by observing the timeframe of Marion’s traumas, this chapter has shown that this crisis is the product of the sum of her ancestors’ actions and beliefs – specifically, Helen’s fatal obsession with *higher whiteness* – that are influenced by the ideological schemata of apartheid. Last but not least, and although given less attention, I have emphasized that Marion’s placement in post-apartheid South Africa and her white privileges enable her “to reach out for the universal”, that is, a hybrid identity of herself in the new era of unremitted crossings – a person neither black nor white – yet simultaneously both (Fanon 153).

6. Conclusion

Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* (2006) is an exemplary work of fiction that elucidates the turbulent history of colouredness in South Africa by imagining the condition of the play- whites and the nonsensical pursuit of whiteness during apartheid and post-apartheid times, thus eloquently critiquing the racial structures of that epoch. My attempt at interpreting the hazardous game of racial passing in the wider context of South Africa's sociopolitical instability had the explicit aim to draw attention to mental illness and the traumatic experiences that play-whites and their descendants had to endure in pursuit of an impalpable, incorporeal – almost ethereal – 'ism', that is, whiteness, and its association with neuroticism and mental illness.

In contrast to previous research that has neglected an in-depth psychoanalytical study of *Playing in the Light* (with the exception of Ateh Laue), my detailed reading of the novel with its focus on Helen Charles and her daughter, Marion Campbell, has provided a psychoanalytical discussion of the specific psychological traumas that inundate the characters. By elaborating on Fanonian race theories and psychoanalysis, my thesis has in particular contextualized psychological stress and the obsession with whiteness in relation to apartheid's ultimatum. In accordance with Erasmus and Fanon's notions of *bricolage* and cultural temporality, this essay has followed the chronological order of events in opposition to the novel's interspersed narratives, in order to avoid the reduction of the character's individual agency. In this manner, the traumatic ramifications of apartheid were first discussed in relation to Helen's obsession with high-class whiteness and Englishness that persists through her upbringing; compels her to succumb, causing neurotic madness and death in the form of cancer; and this is transmitted to her and John's daughter.

In the shadow of Helen's psychotic breakdown, the exploration of mental illness as an emblem of racial oppression was then directed to Marion's psychologically distressed adult life in contemporary Cape Town. Assuming that her mental state is the manifestation of her mother's mental disorder and on a meta-analytical level, a symbol of the unceasing impetus of the racially charged regime of apartheid South Africa, the second chapter moved through the protagonist's childhood to illuminate her unconscious internalization of whiteness until her encounter with the image of Williams. Considering that this uncanny occurrence is "a

historical moment” when the unaware racial passer Marion becomes an “anachronism”, a separate chapter was devoted to examining her increasing psychological disarray, alluding to the traumatic experience of colliding with history and “truth” – which apartheid had previously aimed to “obliterate” (Phiri 120; Marais 179). Following her journey to recovering her origins, my close investigation of her resemblance to Helen allowed for a comparative critique of the two women in their own historical eras; as well as for detecting the conditions that favored Marion to rise above the traumas of the past into a new era of hybridity in contrast to her mother.

As such, my thesis has concluded, in accordance with Wicomb’s understanding of whiteness in her critical essay “Five Afrikaner Texts and the Rehabilitation of Whiteness” and the use of secondary resources, that whiteness as portrayed in the novel – and as abstract as it is by definition – is an unattainable condition, an imaginary concept, and thus its pursuit in lieu of colouredness is the manifestation of Fanon’s observation of neurotic obsession as discussed in *Black Skin/ White Masks* – that is, ‘flamboyant’ neuroticism, or mental illness as illustrated by Helen’s example.

On the contrary, Marion does not need to achieve whiteness or entangle herself in political and historical matters since whiteness is granted to her. Consequently, her unconscious embodiment of the concept becomes palpable through her professional success, material possessions, and monetary acquisitions by which she measures the world – ergo, proving the fundamental necessity of whiteness in relation to class. However, her complicity in perpetuating racial structures is the product of her white upbringing and thus offers a critique of her parents’ game instead and the ideological conditions that made it possible. Yet, after the realization of her origins, Marion is overwhelmed by dubious opinions, but with the help of ‘friends’, traveling, reading, and deep contemplation, she is able to rise from the ashes of apartheid’s oppression and to repudiate the burden of history that is bestowed on her by her parents. As a result, she is reinvented as a hybrid version of herself which is displayed in her changed mindset and attitudes, thus symbolizing the New South Africa.

To bring this to a close, although this thesis has been dedicated to a scantily researched topic, that is, Helen and Marion’s mental illness in relation to the traumas of apartheid, it has not focused on the characters of John and Brenda, who nonetheless play a major role in the construction of the narrative. On this ground, future research could focus on John and Brenda’s experience of apartheid and post-apartheid times. Such a study would add a multi-

dimensional perspective to understanding the questions of mental illness and the traumas of apartheid in Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* (2006).

Last but not least, the deconstructive psychoanalytical method that I have employed in my analysis of *Playing in the Light* could potentially serve as a sample for further studies that examine issues of traumas, cognitive dissonance, anxiety, displacement, and other, in multiple literary works, bridging the gap between non-European literature and psychoanalysis.

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